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# President Higdon's 94th Commencement Address

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# CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

**Connecticut College President Leo I. Higdon, Jr.**

**94<sup>th</sup> Commencement Address**

**May 20, 2012**

Good morning. Graduating students, parents and families, trustees, faculty, staff and honored guests, I welcome you to Connecticut College's 94th Commencement. Today, our program includes remarks by the senior class speaker and awards for two exemplary graduates. We will confer an honorary degree on our distinguished keynote speaker, and present the College Medal to an alumna who has demonstrated distinction – in her field and in her leadership at Connecticut College.

And, of course, in the highlight of today's ceremony, our graduates will receive their very well-earned diplomas.

I have a tradition first that I'd like to share. It's something I've done with every graduating class since I first became a college president over 15 years ago. I'd like to ask all of the graduates to stand now. Stand and recognize those whose support made it possible for you to be here today: Your parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends. Graduates, let's stand, and show our appreciation. OK, please be seated.

And before we begin, I would like to acknowledge our board chair James Berrien, whose term as chair ends in June. Jim has served on the board of trustees for 12 years, three as chair. He is a tireless advocate for Connecticut College, and the impact of his leadership can be seen in every facet of a Connecticut College education. Thank you, Jim, for your extraordinary leadership.

And now, graduates... When you first arrived in that late summer of 2008, I told you that you were an exceptional group of young people – and that much would be expected of you here. Today, I believe we can all agree that both were true. You have proven yourselves through your academics, your citizenship, and the ways in which you have engaged yourselves in the world. I can say without hesitation that you have been challenged here.

Today's ceremony indicates that you have met those challenges. You've spent the last year as seniors, some of the most respected, most intellectually engaged students on this campus. Over four years, you developed close relationships with professors, in some cases conducted research side-by-side. You are leaders on campus, relied upon by students, faculty and staff for your opinions, your expertise and your involvement.

The College confers your degrees today confident that you have mastered the academic content of your coursework. But when you carefully pack away your diploma with the contents of your room and leave campus, you start fresh. You become first-year grad school students, corporate trainees, theater stage hands, aspiring artists, or the neophyte with big dreams in a large not-for-profit. In other words, beginners. And beginning again is tough. With your education, you are equipped to move on. But before you do, I challenge you to welcome all that comes with beginning again. Take on those seemingly menial responsibilities – for example, work all weekend if you're asked, volunteer to do the task no one else will take. Soak in all you can from the more experienced people around you.

That's what I did. And I'll tell you, you will earn respect. You will learn. And you will advance. Of course, as you advance, you will continue to learn. Until, before you know it, you will be the one calling the shots. You will make the discoveries. You will direct the film. And, because you're Connecticut College graduates, you will always continue to learn.

Already you have taken on issues that are important to you and others.

The Class of 2012 includes students who have fought against human trafficking, engaged in dialogues with world leaders, used art to break down barriers, helped a population confront its troubled past. And that's just a small fraction of the impact you've already had on the world.

I am proud to note that the Class of 2012 includes our first cohort of Science Leaders, young women and men who came to this college as pioneers, to be the first students in a program that encourages and supports under-represented students in the sciences.

I visited with our Science Leaders last week at a luncheon in their honor. I was pleased to hear directly from them about their experiences here. They have published in scientific journals, presented research at professional conferences, many have done internships with leading doctors and scientists, and many have studied or conducted research abroad. Here on campus, they have been leaders in student government, the arts, athletics, and overall campus life.

One of the great pleasures of being a college president is my unlimited access to the great minds of the future. And, I want you all to know that each of you, in your own unique way, has shown me that you are the great minds of the future.

Fifty years ago, then President Rosemary Park told the graduating seniors, "On graduation, you become yourselves the faculty, the administration, the student government of that continuing education which is your life."

Today, the College has begun its second century. And, as Rosemary Park did 50 years ago, I charge the graduating seniors to "take responsibility for the continuing education which is your life." Continue to embrace learning in all its forms. Continue to cross boundaries and to make connections that others don't see. Continue to live the values of the Honor Code and to respect and value equity and inclusiveness as part of your life-long learning. Above all, please stay connected to this institution which has invested so much in you.

Thank you.